

Dietetics of the Olden Time



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DIETETICS OF THE OLDEN TIME

By WILLIAM RENWICK RIDDELL

The Science of Dietetics is not a thing of yesterday even among the English-speaking.

In 1671, John Archer, Chymical Physician-in-Ordinary to the King, Charles II, published at London a little volume entitled "Every Man his own Doctor"; while the second part "shews the full knowledge and cure" of many diseases including "Dropsie Consumptions Scurvy Obstructions and Agues," the first sets forth "the Nature and Faculties of all Food as well Meats as drinks, Whereby every Man and Woman may understand what is good and hurtful to them."

The second part may be dismissed with a few words. Every disease is to be cured by the use of "our cordial dyet drink, 2s 6d the quart, Morbus Pill the Box containing 30 at 5s, the Corroborating Pill the box containing 40 at 5s, the Vomiting Pill the box containing 20 at 3s"; all these were to be had "only from my house in Winchester Street near Gresham Colledge next door to the Fleece Tavern."

It will be seen that Archer's simple pharmacopœia was more scant than even that of Samuel Thomson the Botanical physician a century and a half later: the Chymical Physician of the 17th century had only four remedies while the Botanical Empiric of the 19th had at least six.

The more interesting part of the book, however, is the first. The Author, thinking of those who

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"neglect the pretious Jewel of Health . . . live negligently and Eat and Drink they care not what so it be good in it self . . . so it please the Pallat but thereby many dig their Graves with their teeth . . . besides their uncomfortable living in sickness and disease of body," writes his "short compendium . . . whereby every man may be his own Doctor in a Dietet^{al} way." "These Reasons," he says, "made me publish this short tract for thy good that art willing and hast need of Advice least too late thou considerest."

He first speaks of the four Temperaments, "Sanguine, Cholerick, Plegmatick and Melancholl," and how one may determine his temperament. This is of very great importance to all that desire health or Wisdom, "for *Mores sequuntur humores*," and all should correct the excess or defect of heat, cold, moisture or dryness by proper food, etc., "for it is truly said *Contrariae Contrariis Curantur*, all Remedies are performed by the contraries."

We may pass over the chapter on Air and come at once to that "Of Meat or Food."

"Every man may easily see and know by comparing it with his Constitution what is Friendly and healthful to him and wherein it is inimical and therefore know that all Aliment as Meat, and Drink . . . is of vertue to encrease the substance of our bodies for it is a true saying in a sense that we our selves have had our selves upon our trenchers."

Dr. Archer begins with Beef which he thinks a "hard of concoction, thick, flesh which doth not easily pass through the veins . . . the frequent

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use thereof causeth dry and melancholly humours, without exercise and labour of body, especially if it be old Cow Beef or Ox: Beef that with labour and much working hath contracted dryness and hardness of Flesh or is hardened with Salt and Smoak." He therefore concludes that it is "most profitable for laborious people." Veal is "temperate and tender though something Waterish" and "yields a thicker Juyce than Lamb or Mutton."

Of Mutton the best is "Weather, the younger is the best meat . . . and agrees both with those that are well and those that are sick. But Ewe Mutton is evil . . . the Flesh of Ewes is evil and dull and viscid juice is bred thereof." Lamb "when it is a year old, it is a very good nourishment . . . before it be a yeer old hath moist flesh, slimy and viscid."

"Swines flesh nourisheth very plentifully and yields firm nutriment and therefore is most profitable for those that are in their flourishing age." Sucking Pigs are "very nourishing but they agree not with all constitutions, because too much humidity abounds in it, the fumous vapors ascends up to the head, in many causing pain and swimings." Brawn is "difficultly concocted."

The feet of Animals are cold and dry; "All hearts are of a hard and dry nature but if well concocted" (i.e., digested) they are useful "chiefly corroborating the heart by sympathy." The Liver is hard to be concocted; "the Spleen . . . is the receptacle of gross Melancholly blood: . . . therefore not fit for food," the Lungs "nourish but little yet easie of concoction and afford good

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nourishment," the Intestines "not very good but thick Aliment," "the Tongue excels the other parts," the Brain "yields petuitous and thick juice . . . causeth loathing except it be well sharpened with Vinegar."

Venison although "in high esteem with Gentry and Peasant generates Melancholly juice." "Hares flesh is accounted by Physicians for Melancholly meat . . . yet they are thought to generate a good colour in the face, they are best boyled."

Goates flesh is much approved, so too with "Conies if they be not too old."

Of "Fowles . . . the Turkie is of the upper ranck . . . having good juice and laudable nourishment, it is most fit for those that are in health." Hens and Capons are "easie of concoction of good juice . . . the best is the flesh of cram'd Capons, the next is that of fat Chickens, the next are Pullets; as for old Cocks and Hens their flesh is harder and dryer and not to be eaten but by laborious people."

Geese.—A well concocted goose "affords plenty of nourishment but the delacacy of a Goose is the Liver which if it be well fatted especially with sweet food, as boiled Carrots, etc."

Tame Ducks, except the young ones, are not approved of but Wild Duck and Mallard "yeilds good nourishment and do not easily putrifie in the Stomack." Pheasants are recommended to all in health as are Partridges and Quail, but the sick must not eat of Quails, "because they are apt to generate Feavers." Pigeons are "most dangerous in a Putrid Feaver." Plovers, Cocks (i.e., Wood

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Cocks), Snites (old form of "Snipes"), Thrushes, Black birds and Larks are all admirable, especially the Lark which "hath a peculiar quality not only to preserve one from the Chollick but also to cure it."

"Fishes scarce afford so good juyce as Corn and Fruit and other Vegetables, they are cold, easily putrifie and if they are corrupted they acquire a quality most dangerously adverse to our natures."

Salmon is "the best of Fish but when they are pickled with salt and harboiled with smoak they are much worse and difficultly concocted." Trouts come next to Salmon. Soles plaice and Turbot are highly commended except when they are "dried in the Smoak." Gudgeons and Smelts may safely be given to those that are sick; to these, other little fishes are alike as Dore and Minners, etc."

A Carp, especially "if it be fat . . . stewed in Wine as the manner is, makes a Princely dish . . . but (alas) is not fit for sick people." Pike on the contrary "may also be given to those that are sick. Perch "hath tender flesh . . . the Juyce is not evil yet it affords weaker Aliment." Bream is to be eaten but "not to be mixed with divers kinds of meats"; Tench is approved while "a Barbel whose Eggs perchance gave an occasion for some to suppose he hears very bad, causes not only pain but also vomiting . . . and stirs up Choller." Naturally "from the use thereof we ought to abstain." The use of Eells is not safe for sick people; Lampreys are not numbered by

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Physitians among Fishes of the best sort but Herrings are, except when "pickled with salt or hardened with Smoak." Codfish and Stockfish are not to be eaten "without danger to any save those that have healthy strong stomachs and labor much." Sturgeon give firm nutriment and are "very lasting to work upon." Lobsters and Crabs "will not well digest but in a strong stomach," while Oysters and Scollops "have a soft juice . . . and being hard of concoction nourish but little."

Passing now to Meats from living creatures, Milk comes in for a good word. Sound "Animals only generate good milk but such diseased animals generate vitious and corrupt. The best milk . . . is of a good smel and sweet to the taste . . . neither too thick nor too thin, neither Serous nor Caseous." "Although in Consumptions sometimes is prescribed Woman's Milk, Asses Milk or Goats Milk, yet for Food, none is so good as Cows milk, and of that sort the Red Cow is best and in a Consumption I should prefer it before the former being taken warm while the spirit of the animal is in it." Cheese does not receive much commendation; still "it is very useful to close the mouth of the stomach after a full meal, being eaten to the quantity of a dram or two" but "it is always to be eaten sparingly and after other meats." Whey "is more fit for Medicine than Food."

Eggs afford much nourishment. "The newest eggs are the best and nourish most and soonest . . . but the stalest are the worst." "As for the cooking of them they are best when the yolk is soft and the Rear hardened to a white colour and

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so supt up, being boyled in water, they may easily be given to a weak Stomack: they are stronger in tast, boyled in the shell than potched, especially if Roasted but the worst way of dressing them is to fry them in a pan." Honey "is not good for the Liver but very good for the Lungs"; and Sugar is valuable for its "cleansing quality in the body of man."

Passing into the Vegetable Kingdom, the Doctor discusses Wheat approved for all, Barley especially for the sick, Rye not so good as Wheat, "causing in some, griping pains," Rice "especially boyled with Milk," Oats "very useful in pottages and broaths which may be given to sick or well", Beans which "make the senses dull," Pease which "yield better nourishment than beans . . . and are very pleasing to Stomachs surfeited with overfulness of stronger Food." Parsnips "are hot and dry . . . they are more useful in Physick then Food." Turnips "are safely eaten with meat or alone buttered, being baked their Juyce makes a good Surrup for a Consumption." Carrots are very wholesome, Radish commonly used for "Sawce" while Mustard "is much for heat, tast and efficacy like the Root of Wild Horse radish. Leeks and Garlick "have a power of attenuating thick Phlegm and viscid humours, taking away cold and this is a good Remedy . . . against the Plague and venemous Air," while Onions "are all hurtful to the Head, Eyes, Teeth and Gums and cause disturbive sleep and turbulent dreams." Cabbage does not recommend itself to the author, it "affords little nourishment . . . fulliginous

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vapours fly into the head and produce turbalent sleep and weakens the sight, and are very dangerous for those that are incident to a Vertigo or swimming in the head." Still "being boyled in the broath with Fat Meat, it is somewhat corrected, yet the stinking coction or broath shews its danger and that its only fitting for laborious people." Artechoaks are not much better. Lettice is "the best of Sallads . . . corrects Choller and good for hot Stomachs, it provokes sleep." Spinage is "not profitable." Beets, Orach and Mallows "nourish little and yields a watry Juyce and unpleasing of tast, except the sawce mends them." Asparagus and young branches of Hops "are grateful to the tast and cause Appetite . . . "; Parsley affords but little nourishment while Purslain is an "excellent sallad with Oyl." Mints are pleasing in smell and "very strengthning to the Stomach, they stay Vomiting and are a most excellent Sallad minced in Vinegar and Sugar for any fresh meat." "Melones are pleasant in tast and send forth an Aromatick Smell but are of a cold watry moist substance. . . but are easily corrupted and being corrupted become as it were of a poysonous nature and stir up Choller or generate Feavers whereby many great men are killed," therefore "after the eating of them some good Food ought to be eaten and good Wine to be drank that their corrupting may be hindred." Cucumbers are much the same but not so dangerous. Strawberries "are profitable to those that troubled with Choller in the Stomach, they cool the Liver . . . but are easie corrupted in the Stomach,

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therefore ought to be eaten before meat." Apples "are beneficial to those which are troubled with Melancholly." Pears and Quinces have no good qualities, nor Peaches unless these be "boyled in Wine"; but Apricocks are pleasing to the Stomach and not easily corrupted. Medlers should not be eaten till they are rotten, Cherries quench thirst and raise an Appetite and black cherries are "most wholesome and indeed Medicinal against Convulsions." Plumbs are "chiefly profitable to Cholorick Stomachs"; "the white or yellowish are the worst, but the best are of a black or blew colour like Damsons or Damask Prunes." "Mulluries are to be eaten when the stomach is empty only." Figs have "a penetrating and cleansing faculty." Grapes are apt to "stir up Chollick Fits and cause the spleen to swell and fill the Stomach and Liver with crude humours." Of Nuts, Almonds are the best but they are "not good to be given in Feavers"; Filberds and Hasle-Nuts come next in "vertue"; Walnuts when old are apt to cause a cough and cause a pain in the head but "the use of them is commended after eating of Fish because their heating and dryness prevent the corruption of Fish." Chestnuts are believed by "Gallen that learned Physitian," to "have no ill juyce," but they should not be "eaten in too great plenty." Olives are temperate while "the oyle drawn from them that are ripe . . . correct the gravity of other Aliments, amends the Crudity of Herbs, nay resists Poyson . . . and mitigates pain internally and externally."

Of Mushrooms or Toad Stools, the author wisely

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says "oftentimes they are poysonous therefore better let alone than eaten."

Then comes a chapter on Drink. Of Water, that is preferred which spreads towards the East and runs Eastward, of Rain Water that which falls in Summer time with Thunder; Well Water, Lake and Marrish Waters are all condemned, as is the water from Snow or Ice. Of Wines, sweet wines of fragrant smell, pale or white rather than red or deep colored, old rather than new, should be drunk. Of Beer and Ale "all new drink is more unwholesome." Honey Drinks are "good for the Phlegmatick and bad for the Chollerick," while Coffee "will make him that drinks it vigilant for it doth much hinder sleep . . . is bad to be drank near bed time . . . being in itself potentially cold it is innocent, working no wonders but one, viz., It hath made many poor people by selling it, become very rich." Tobacco is good for a vulnerary. "Smoaked" it is good for Phlegmaticks, for Rhumes, Catarrhs, Distillations and Hydropick persons, bad for the Chollerick constitutioned. If those chollerick constitutioned do "smoak" it is best for them to drink before and after "least their natural heat with the heat of the Tobacco may be inflamed and cause a burning at the Heart and in the Stomach."

This part of the book terminates with a chapter of most excellent advice on exercise of body and mind, rest and "sleep and watching."

Until Alexis St. Martin shot a hole in his stomach, most of the so-called knowledge of digestion was pure guess-work, and Dr. Archer per-

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haps makes as good a guess as any other. With many of his conclusions, gourmets and physicians will agree, with some, one class and not the other, while occasionally he makes an assertion altogether fantastic and discredited.

Taken as a whole, his dietetics cannot be said to have been behind his age or a discredit even to a King's "Chymical Physitian."